

At the Heart of Flights Across the Himalayan Hump, 1944

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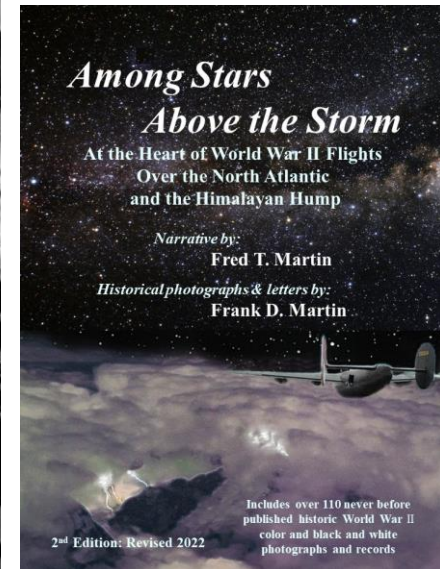
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Photo Art: Fred Martin
Base Photo: Frank D. Martin 1944

WWII QUARTERLY

Summarized from:



Winston Churchill called it, “An immense laborious task, unlikely to be completed until the need for it has passed.” Churchill was referring to the construction of the Ledo Road out of the Assam province at the eastern extremity of India, to connect with the Burma Road, the ancient high-mountain pathway to interior China. The need was for massive shipments of supplies for Allied air bases in China, and gasoline to fuel B-29s attacking Japan from deep inside China. Twenty thousand engineers and thirty-five thousand natives labored for two years to open the Ledo Road. When finally completed, truck caravans took over a month to cross the 800 miles to China, over grades up to 17%, and under continuous Japanese air attacks. Churchill was nearly correct. The road was completed less than a year from the war’s end.

As it was with many of America’s efforts in World War II, the event that prompted this enormous construction project was the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In popular perception, Pearl Harbor is often seen as a singular, defining event. In fact, it was just the first step in a complex Japanese plan that was so rapidly executed on such a global scale, that the scope and speed of this campaign rivals any military conquest in history. Immediately after disabling much of the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese sealed off their homeland, along with China, from Pacific islands and then they exploded across the Pacific with incredible speed. They seized and fortified the Marianas and other island chains so that Allied air retaliation could not reach Japan from the Pacific. (The Doolittle raid from an aircraft carrier four months later, was the first U.S. bombing attack on Japan.) The day after Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces attacked the Philippines, eventually capturing McArthur’s Allied troops. McArthur vowed to return. They moved into Indochina, Thailand, down the Malay Peninsula to overwhelm British Singapore. They took the Dutch East Indies. Australia and Alaska were threatened. The Axis powers now held over 1/3rd of the planet.

Late into that grim December, 1941, Japan was poised to move next on India. If they cut off access to the Burma Road from the seaport of Rangoon, the Allies could not supply China. Then, on Christmas Eve, 1941, Japan brutally attacked British Burma and seized Rangoon.

How long did it take the Japanese to go from Pearl Harbor to Rangoon in their attempt to utterly isolate China and control the Pacific? It was accomplished between December 7 and December 24 in two weeks! This certainly exceeded Japan's own expectations for the campaign. We can only imagine the astonished jubilation in Tokyo command headquarters, in stark contrast to the terror of panicked realization in Washington DC and throughout the Allied Command.

The Asian theater turned to chaos. Churchill's eastern British empire was collapsing. An American-British-Dutch command was hastily formed to defend the region. American commanders immediately demanded bomber air bases in China and the fortification of Chinese resistance forces. China was made an ally and General Chiang Kai Shek became Allied Supreme Commander for China. With Pacific islands and now Rangoon under Japanese control, these bases could only be supplied from eastern India. With the Burma Road cut off from the sea, the massive Ledo Road project was commenced to connect the Assam Valley to the Burma Road in the north.

Here was a place so remote, most Americans had only a cloudy notion of its far-away existence as a place of mythical legend in storybooks. By April, 1942, the arduous movement of truck caravans was not meeting the enormous requirements of the China bases. It was becoming clear that ground transport on the Ledo Road was not practical. The transport problem would be solved by airlift over the highest terrain on Earth. The "Hump" airlift operation was thus created.

The India China Airlift, or Himalayan HUMP Operation, was the highest-loss, highest-risk air transport mission of World War II. Pioneering aviators carried thousands of tons of gasoline and materiel across the highest terrain on Earth to supply the bases deep in the interior of China to support early bombing missions on Japan. Flight operations had never been attempted over the planet's highest and most rugged mountains, much less, on a year-round, all-weather basis. Winds were measured at over 250 miles per hour and downdrafts were encountered of over 3,000 feet per minute. Average terrain levels on some routes were 20,000 feet above sea level. Air fields were carved out of forests and navigation aids were scarce. Add to that the intensely hazardous payload of thousands of gallons of gasoline carried on many of these flights.

As operations accelerated, over 10,000 tons were carried across the Hump per month. In all, 650,000 tons were delivered over the Himalayas. It is estimated that, on average, for each 500 tons, a flight crew member was lost. The total cost was the deaths of over 1,300 air crew and more than 600 aircraft lost. There were nearly 1,200 bailouts over the Hump, 345 men were not found and listed as missing in action. General Claire Chenault, the region's air commander, said that only men of special caliber could live up to the demands of the Hump. They were the swashbuckling pilots of the India China wing.

The "Hump" operation completed the longest materiel supply line in the world. After the 12,000-mile ocean voyage from the U.S. to Karachi or Bombay, shipments traveled 1,500 miles on India's dilapidated main rails to connect with the ancient Bengal to Assam rail line. That route, called "The Toonerville Trolley" by American personnel, had been built to haul tea and changed gauges three times on the way to a barge crossing at the Brahmaputra River. Then, every bean and bullet, as one commander put it, had to be flown from bases in Assam over into China. General Chenault estimated that for every ton of bombs delivered to Japan, 18 tons of materiel had to be flown over the Hump.

The air route to China rose out of the Brahmaputra River valley from airbases at about 200 feet above sea level, out to the northeast over the 10,000-foot Naga Hills named for the head-hunting tribe that lived there. It then crossed the gorges of the Irrawaddy, Salween, and Mekong rivers, and on up to the backbone of the Hump, the Santsung Ranges of eastern Sichuan and Tibet. Pilots referred to the route as "the aluminum trail"

because of the number of airplanes lost along it. Clayton Kuhles of MIARecoveries.org conducts heroic modern expeditions into the high mountains to locate wreckages of Hump aircraft. They have found 27 missing aircraft and 279 personnel, some listed for decades as missing in action.

Hump crews flew over regions of the Earth never before seen by human eyes. These were pioneering aviation routes. My father often flew alongside Minya Konka the highest peak in eastern Sichuan standing a thousand miles east of any mountain of comparable height. This area was long a blank spot on the map until the 1930s when a National Geographic expedition estimated that Minya Konka might be higher than Everest, no one knew. Still today, fewer than 60 alpinists have climbed the mountain; sixteen climbers have died in the attempt.



24,790 ft Minya Konka from the pilot's seat of a C-87.

Frank D. Martin 1944

Many histories often overlook the heart and soul of the human being who experienced war. So, for my father and mother and many other veterans I have studied, the personal story of war is where the core meaning of history is best revealed. I first heard of the Hump Operation when I was a young man fishing with my father, Frank D. Martin, on a remote Canadian lake. Dad had never told many war stories, but that day, between hooking Walleyes, he spontaneously, and uncharacteristically, began telling me of aerial gasoline tanker crashes at his World War II airbase in India. He was suddenly recalling in obvious anguish, how he had to watch helplessly as friends perished before his eyes, the flailing of those men's bodies as they were consumed by the flames and the pouring black smoke, and how they slumped over still buckled in their seats as the cockpit exploded and he was powerless to rescue them. I was stunned and awkwardly turned away to the tackle box in silence. But then I turned back from the fishing gear and promised him that one day, I would write his biography.

Seven years after his passing, remembering my promise, I dug into his scrap book records. Yet, the clippings in those shoe boxes were entirely from his post-war years with the Cessna Aircraft Company. He became Vice President of Marketing. I have told that story in another book, **Reminiscences Over Old Airplanes**. His lengthy autobiographical notes offered little about the war. What he wrote about all his World War II experiences -everything I write about in my book, **Among Stars Above the Storm**, and all that I tell here- was a total of six sentences!

My father was like many of his World War II contemporaries, eager to return to a new life away from the war they were weary of. When they might have been ready to talk about it, there were few who had not been to war who could understand. Also, among veterans, there was an ethic against tale-telling braggadocio. Most believed that the only heroes of any merit, and the only ones who deserved to have their stories told were the ones who did not return. During my boyhood time with him my father did recount a few stories that provided key recollections for my book, but he was too busy living in the post-war world as an explorer, aviator, and businessman, to look back at the past, and he spoke very little about the war.

So, this story would have been lost. But several years later came a blessing within a life tragedy. I had to move my brilliant, high achieving mother into an Alzheimer's care facility. After the war my mother, Sarah E. Martin, had her own illustrious career in the Federal Government becoming Secretary to the Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). When she moved to the care home, I cleaned out her house discovering her most secret possessions. Deep in a lower drawer, hidden beneath old clothing, were loose leaf binders of 211 letters my father had written to her during his nine months in India. That was nearly a letter each day, each one lengthy, hand-penned from a jungle hut or from a freezing cockpit high above the most remote mountain reaches of the Earth.

My parents divorced when I was six so these letters which revealed a love story of a grandeur that reflects the world war it was set within were of great value to me. Here I had the secret window on their war-parted love affair. The letters when correlated with the pilot log books allowed me to assemble the details of event-filled flights between India and China and daily life in India. They reveal my father's intensifying stress and emotional state as his time in India wore on. Mother also saved notebooks of his Army orders and teletype war reports from all over the world that had come in to her office where she worked, remarkably, as Secretary to the Commander, New Castle Army Air Base, Wilmington, Delaware. This was the base of departure for my father's trans-Atlantic flights delivering B-17 bombers to the 8th Air Force in Europe, and from where he departed on his long flight around the world to India; to the Hump. In all the intervening years she had never revealed that she had these letters. Dad never mentioned them and had likely assumed Mother had not kept them after their divorce.

Finally, in 2007 I opened old cigar boxes of 3x5 black and white photographs, curled, faded and crumbling, along with a brown case of carefully labeled color Kodachrome slides. At that time, these photos were over 65 years old! In their original deteriorating condition, they had never much caught the family's eye. Yet after computer restoration and enlargement, the composition and quality of many of the photographs was astonishing. Many revealed that Dad had quite a knack for composition along with a compassionate eye for his subjects. And these were subjects of historic proportion. I had discovered another treasure that illumined the first, and brought the letters from India vividly alive.

My father arrived in India on April 30, 1944. He had been assigned to deliver a twin-engine C-47 from Wilmington, Delaware to Sookerating, India. It is illustrative of the enormity of operations required to move thousands of U.S. aircraft around the world in World War II that Dad's flight to India took 22 days and 95 1/2 flight hours. The trip proceeded across the Caribbean, down the coast of Brazil, across the Atlantic to Ascension Island, across North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and across the breadth of India.

Shortly after he arrived something quite remarkable occurred. Dad went to watch a movie at the airbase outdoor theater. He noticed a fellow nearby watching him. He glanced over and the fellow looked away. Dad looked away. Then they looked back at each other. It was Dad's cousin, Frank Osborne! They had been boyhood companions in the mountains of southwest Virginia. Cousin Frank was a P-40 fighter pilot passing through this altogether remote end of the Earth on his way home from China. His P-40 squadron had been defending the China bases at the other end of the Burma Road as part of the famous Flying Tigers, General Chennault's colorful and deadly renegade fighter force that had first driven back the Japanese air advance in the region. Neither one knew the other was even in the war! This was a time when farm and city kids who had never been more than a few miles from their homes in America, were sent to all ends of the Earth. World War II globalized thousands of the plain folk of America, and all the far reaches of the world began to become Americanized. Yet here was a chance

meeting on the other side of the planet, as remote from the Virginia hills as anyone could ever find themselves, that defied belief.

Two days prior to my father's first flight over the Hump, in the church service that Sunday at the base chapel, a passage was read from Psalm 46 which included:

“ . . . we will not fear, though the Earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, . . . though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the water whereof shall make glad the City of God.”

It is the Brahmaputra River, flowing down from the great Himalayan ranges of Tibet and China and the foothills of Burma, that flows through the Assam Province at the eastern extremity of India. On the banks of that river amidst tea plantations and rice paddies carved from flowering jungles known for a rare species of black tigers that live there, sits the city of Tezpur. It is a name from an ancient Hindu warrior legend that means, “City of Blood.” There the Army had built one of a series of air bases along the river, positioned for missions to the northeast over the high mountains to China.

A number of aircraft types flew the Hump. Operations began with the twin-engine C-47, the military variant of the Douglas DC-3. The larger twin-engine C-46 was famous over the Hump, along with the four-engine C-54. My father flew the transport derivatives of the four-engine B-24 bomber platform, the C-87 and C-109. My study has focused on technical details of those airplanes. The C-87 was hastily developed in early 1942 as a heavy cargo and personnel transport with longer range and better high-altitude performance than the C-46 or C-47. It was converted from the B-24 bomber by deleting gun turrets and other armament and the installation of a strengthened cargo floor running through the bomb bay. A door was added on the port side, and windows were fitted along the sides of the fuselage. The C-87 could carry up to 25 passengers or 12,000 lbs. of cargo. With war production shortages, many C-87's were fitted with turbosuperchargers with lower boost pressure than those fitted to B-24s destined for combat use, so ceiling and climb rate were adversely affected. Yet, over the Hump, the C-87 was the only readily available American transport with adequate high-altitude performance to fly this route with a large cargo load.

The C-87 was plagued by numerous problems. Ernest K. Gann, a C-87 pilot who hated the airplane, wrote in his beautiful book, Fate Is the Hunter, *"They were an evil bastard contraption, nothing like the relatively efficient B-24 except in appearance."* Problems included a clumsy flight control layout, frequent engine problems, hydraulic leaks, and a disconcerting tendency to lose electrical power in the cockpit during takeoff and landing. The C-87 did not climb well when heavily loaded, a dangerous characteristic when flying out of the unimproved, rain-soaked airfields of India and China. Many crashed soon after takeoff. Gann himself had a near-collision with the Taj Mahal in a C-87 in a takeoff mishap. He wrote, *"The assembly of parts known collectively as a C-87 would never replace an airplane."* The aircraft's auxiliary fuel tanks were linked by improvised and often leaky fuel lines that crisscrossed the crew compartment, choking crews with noxious gasoline fumes and creating an explosion hazard. The C-87 also had a tendency to enter an uncontrollable stall or spin in the event of inflight airframe icing, a frequent occurrence over the Himalayas. Gann said the C-87 *"...could not carry enough ice to chill a highball."*

The C-87 also had center-of-gravity problems due to improper cargo loading. Unlike other cargo transports designed from the start with a contiguous cargo compartment and safety margin for fore and aft loading variations, the bomb racks and bomb bays in the B-24 design were fixed in position, greatly limiting the aircraft's ability to tolerate improper loading. This problem was made worse by the failure of the Air Transport Command to instruct loadmasters in the C-87's peculiarities. The C-87's roots as a bomber were also considered the cause of frequently collapsing nose gear. Its strength was adequate for a B-24 that dropped its payload in flight before landing, but it was a weak design for C-87s making repeated hard landings on rugged unimproved airstrips while heavily loaded.

The C-109 was a dedicated fuel transport version of the B-24 platform. It is considered the first U.S. aerial tanker. It carried 2,900 U.S. gallons of aviation fuel in several internal fuel tanks in addition to the 2,800 gallons in the wing tanks. These planes burned three gallons of fuel for every gallon delivered. The C-109 was even more unpopular with its crews than the C-87. The aircraft had unstable flight characteristics with all storage tanks filled, and proved very difficult to land fully loaded. At least eighty C-109s were lost in flying the Hump airlift. A crash landing of a loaded C-109 inevitably resulted in an explosion and crew fatalities.

Indeed, at the Tezpur base aircraft were crashing regularly on takeoff in horrific fireballs. Flights were frequently lost enroute to Japanese attackers and for reasons unknown. In early June, 1944, the ship of the chief pilot was reported missing, then another colleague crashed. My father wrote to Mother, *“He’s in the hospital with broken bones. Some of his crew were not so fortunate. Our safety record here has just gone flop the last few days. Two crews lost, one definitely all killed, the other missing. Hainey still in the hospital in China, Bill Schonessee is OK except for missing most of his teeth. Sure wish the enemy would just fold up but I can’t see it for a mighty long time. To listen to Jap broadcasts from Shanghai you would think that they are going to win.”*

The India-China airlift was a non-combat operation, and that imparted an added sense of tragedy to the frequent crashes. If an airline or any transport operation suffered such multiple crashes each week, with many right at the airport, then what pilot would continue flying and what passenger or crew member would ever board the aircraft? On takeoff in a loaded tanker, the airplane is sluggish, barely airborne, balanced on a tight wire of airspeed wherein single mile-per-hour increments make all the difference between a climb beyond hill or trees, or mushing back to the ground. A backfiring engine, a downdraft, a payload slightly off center of gravity, a momentary lapse in concentration, these were only some of the factors that could bring down the airplane and its six-thousand-gallon load of gasoline.

Early in 1944, the commander of operations issued a directive that no flights were to be cancelled or delayed because of weather. This order was widely referred to as the *“There will no longer be weather”* decree, and pilots quipped that if the weather could be thus ordered away, perhaps a similar order could be issued to the Japs. Weather had closed the route to China half the time.

Air bases on both sides of the Hump were built employing native labor. Entire families worked on India bases, while in China, rock crushers, mostly women, broke gravel using hammers, then carried it to the airstrip in baskets on their heads. Up to 100,000 coolies worked on each China base. Construction equipment was scarce. Ox carts were used to haul rock. Hand drawn rollers pulled by a hundred coolies or more flattened the field. The result was a bumpy airfield about six thousand feet in length.



An iconic Hump scene: Chinese coolies rolling the strip at the Kwangan airfield. C-46s in the background. Frank D. Martin 1944

My father's experiences flying the Hump were common to the experiences of most crews in the operation. The arduous unrelenting pace of flight operations can only be appreciated by reading his pilot flight logs on one hand, and his letters home to Mother from the same date on the other. Dad's August, 14 trip was typical: a ten and a half hour round robin to Chengtu, back over to Sookerating, and down to Tezpur. Then he was called out at 4am for another flight, a seven-hour, forty-minute round trip back to Chengtu. He wrote Mother that night, "*Now it's after ten and I just got through talking to Buddy and other guests. I am so tired and dopey that I really don't know what I am doing half the time. It sure gets dark out over that thousand miles of stone at night. That is, until we hit the roughest weather yet last night, and the storms lit things up like day. We were barely getting over the top of the thunderclouds, and when we broke clear, we were flying among stars above the storm.*" That's the passage that gave the title for my book.

The pace of operations intensified. On the 3rd of September there was a ten-and-a-half-hour trip to and from Chengtu. The next day, the flight was nine hours, forty-five minutes to and from Pengshan. The next day: eleven hours to Kwanghan, then, Kwanghan again on both the next two days. There was no time to worry over the deaths of other pilots. The most imminent enemy was crushing fatigue. Just one of these trips over the Himalayas was a flight of expeditionary proportion at this time in aviation history. Two days later Dad flew his fortieth trip over the Hump to Pengshan. The next day he flew back to Pengshan and Sookerating. The next day, 10 and a half hours to Kwanghan, then, another round trip to Kwanghan on the same day! That was an unimaginable 22 hours of flying the Himalayas in one 24-hour period, after one night off in ten consecutive days of such flights.

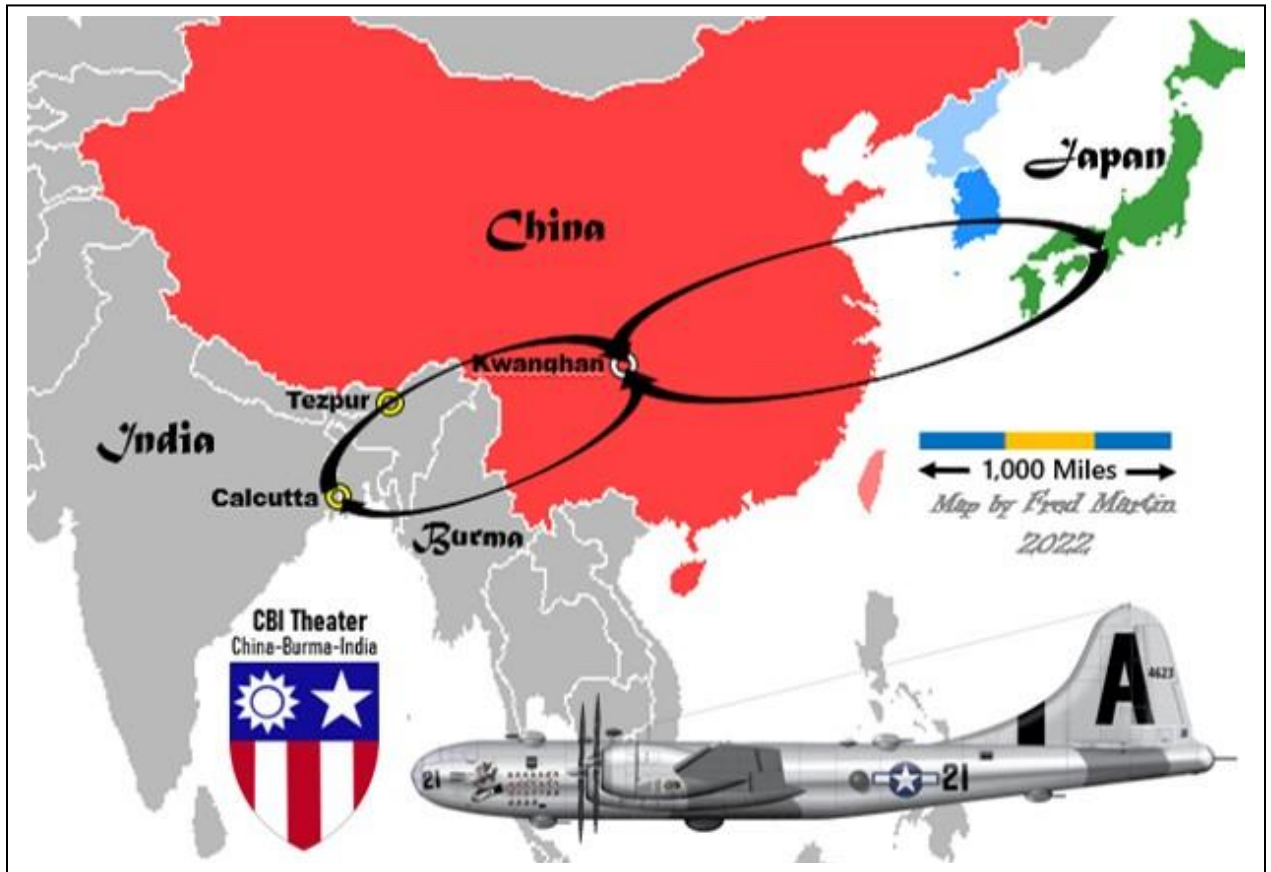
The next day Dad wrote Mother a letter about those 22 hours of flying, "*Dearest Sally: Had a long trip yesterday and didn't get to bed until 2 am today. Flew 35 Chinese back to India last night and landed them at another base so was late getting home.*" These were Chinese Nationalist soldiers under Chiang Kai-shek. Most had no boots, only straw sandals. The bedding issued to some units was one blanket per five soldiers, and pay was so low even officers could not afford any more than rice. They were plagued by dysentery, small pox, and typhus to such a degree that some units had 40% losses without entering combat. Dad wrote of his passengers that night: "*You have never smelt a real odor.*" Because of censoring, what Dad could not mention in this letter is that several of these Chinese soldiers had died in his airplane. It had been a six-hour flight over the mountains with no oxygen at sub-zero temperature. Years later, that day while we were fishing together, Dad wondered if the families of the dead ever found out what had happened to them, or if the soldiers who had survived the flight had ever found their way back home across the Himalayas.



Frank D. Martin 1944

A few days later he wrote mother, *"I need a good cry tonight but just can't. One of our finest friends; one of the best fellows I have met was killed last night. His ship crashed and burned right after takeoff."* Two days later another ship crashed on takeoff killing three in the crew with one badly hurt survivor. *"Can't tell you how I feel right now,"* Dad wrote, *"If I only had you to talk with sometimes, I could stand things so much better."* The funeral for their friend was the next day and then the survivor of this latest crash died in the morning. It had been the young man's first Hump mission.

After another flight to Kwanghan, Dad wrote mother, *"Did you hear?! We bombed Japan yesterday! It was B-29s from our theater!"* This is what the massive effort was all about hauling all this gasoline over the mountains. He went on, *"I can't answer your question about where the B-29s are. It's secret. No one but the Japs and a couple million other people know where they're based. They sure are big though!"* He had no idea at that moment that he would be a B-29 commander in 10 months.



These B-29 missions through Kwanghan defy belief. Flying from Calcutta over the Hump they landed in Kwanghan to refuel and load ordinance. Then, the incredible round trip to bomb Japan, back to refuel in Kwanghan and then return to Calcutta where the bombers were safer from Japanese attack.

On October 7 my father and co-pilot took off toward China. Heading into the mountains they encountered turbulence so severe that a man's head would be smashed on the ceiling of the cockpit if not for the shoulder harnesses holding them to their seats. A barrel burst and 55 gallons of gasoline spilled out on the deck. This was the era of many arcing electric relays and red glowing vacuum tube radios. The co-pilot began frantically tugging on his harness releases wanting to get up and get his chute on. He preferred bailing out in a thunder storm over the Himalayas to dying in a fireball. Releasing the shoulder harness would have been enough to kill him. Eventually, they broke out in the clear and set a return course for Tezpur. They shut down all the electrics they could, and planned their landing of the heavily loaded freighter. The landing gear could be cranked down by hand, but they were going to have to use the electric landing flaps to stop the airplane on the jungle strip, and there would likely be a small electric arc when they hit the switch. Dad winced as he reached

for the flap switch, he hesitated, and then lowered the flaps. He wrote mother, *“There was no reason the aircraft didn’t explode.”* For security reasons, pilots included few details of flights in their logbooks. Dad’s log entry for this flight has the rather understated notation: *“Returned with leaky gas drum.”*

Two nights later, Dad was supposed to fly to China, but another ship crashed on the field and he went to the hospital. *“There were five aboard,”* he wrote Mother, *“all real badly hurt. I gave a transfusion to the pilot so I can’t fly again for another day. He died a few minutes later, which doesn’t speak too well for my blood, but he was so badly mangled and broken, and it’s a miracle he lived even a minute. Another one is being operated on for multiple skull fractures and chances aren’t too good. But the doctors have pretty high hopes for the other three. Somehow this crash doesn’t bother me a bit, but the last one I told you about had me pretty upset. Several ships have just disappeared in route, the Japs have gotten a couple, and with all the crashes going on you get so that it’s just another one.”*

The next night Dad mailed his letter and went out for another flight. He had a new copilot he had known on the North Atlantic runs. It was the fellow’s first trip over the Hump. It was foggy that night, visibility was obscured as they held short in the rumbling tanker waiting for clearance. Dad took the runway and accelerated. Halfway down, another tanker came looming out of the dark fog head-on. The other pilot was taxiing and he kicked his rudder pedal hard and turned his ship off the runway into a ditch that ran alongside. That ship’s nose wheel dropped in the ditch and the big double rudders cantilevered up in front of Dad’s accelerating airplane. There was no time to react, and no space to maneuver in. His ship had not reached liftoff speed, but Dad pulled back hard on the control column and the gasoline laden C-109 wavered off the ground, with one of the main landing gear striking a rudder on the other aircraft. Dad’s ship yawed wildly, but somehow remained in flight and clawed out over the trees. After gaining a stable flight attitude they had to make a decision. The landing gear must have been bent or broken, they reasoned. Surely the tire must have been blown out. The co-pilot went back to look out a window; he tried to assess damage with a flashlight. Nothing was apparent, but it was impossible to know. Should they return for landing in Tezpur overloaded with gasoline, or try retracting the gear and burn off their wing tanks flying to China where they might not be able to lower the gear, but would be lighter for landing? Their duty was to deliver the fuel to China. They retracted the gear and had a very anxious flight to Kwanghan. The landing there was without incident. A hearing was later convened on this runway accident. The field controller that night charged that Dad had taken the runway without a clearance. Dad’s testimony was simply honest, *“I was so tired and sleepy I really can’t tell you if I had a clearance or not.”* Two other pilots listening on the field frequency that night testified they had heard the clearance. Perhaps they heard it, perhaps they were covering for a colleague. Either way, all knew it was senseless to court-marshal a desperately needed pilot. The hearing was closed.

The next night after this harrowing flight, Dad went to relax at the outdoor movie before his next departure scheduled for the early morning. The movie was “Shine On Harvest Moon,” but it was cut short when there was an explosion and the sky lit up like day. Another tanker had crashed a mile after takeoff, not as fortunate as Dad had been the night before. *“It all seems so insane and useless to me,”* he wrote Mother, *“It isn’t the Hump that’s dangerous, but the rushing and assigning of unqualified personnel.”* He returned to his basha late that night from the crash scene. The chaplain and several others were on the porch conversing in low tones. They gave him more bad news. The young pilot who lived next door was missing. They found the wreckage in China the next morning. He wrote, *“Four more dead - all of them. Penny wise and pound foolish the way the Army does things, and it sure makes you sick. We have a cute little puppy now named “Ding How.” The young man who was killed last night brought her back from China and raised her on an eye dropper. Now that he’s gone, she seems to have adopted us.”*

The central story my father would have wanted told was about people. He actually took few photos and wrote little about airplanes and operations. His real story is that he fell in love with the people of India and most of what he wrote was about his growing fondness for the people of Assam. He became close to one family in

particular and spoke of the most peaceful family life and the most beautiful children in the world. He wrote, *"They gave me coconuts and pineapples. If I had taken it, I would have had enough food for a week and they didn't have enough for themselves."* Between most of his flights, even when he was severely fatigued or ill with chronic fevers, he escaped on his bicycle to spend time with his Indian family. He wrote of *"the most beautiful children in the world"* and a more peaceful and loving family life than he had ever imagined.

He did write, *"The filth these people live in is unbelievable. At one home today, there were twelve kids and three generations living in a basha smaller than mine."* Yet, as his connections to these people quickly grew, he saw beyond their living conditions and preferred to go alone to their villages because others from the base would remark at the uncleanness and insult his friends or fear catching a disease. *"When I am alone I get much closer to them and really learn how they live and what they think,"* Dad wrote. He said there were many things they could teach Americans.

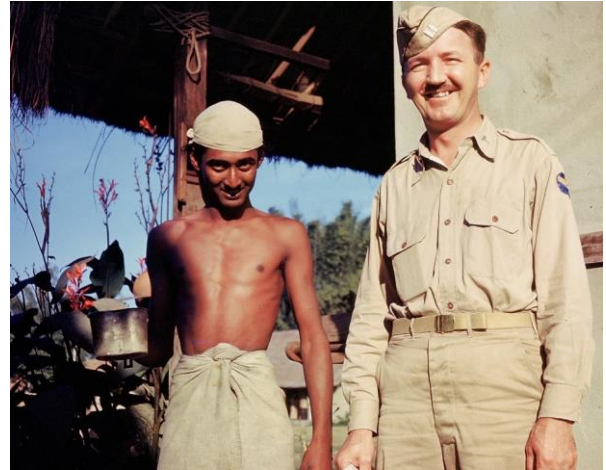
On a morning after a ten-hour flight, he packed up some candy and his camera and started through the jungle trails. He toured a Hindu temple, a tea plantation, and the local boy's school. Then he went to the homes of Hindu families. His letter said, *"Had some very interesting visits with several families and saw the cutest children. I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon and wish you could have been with me. They gave us tangerines and coconut milk to drink. It was so peaceful and pleasant sitting there in their yard with little kids all around me, that I hated to come back to camp. There is nothing wrong with India that a few intelligent, unselfish people couldn't cure. Of course, if I said that openly here at base I would be called the most stupid one yet. But I have seen more and asked more questions among the natives than others here. Since I have looked around over here there are some beautiful places, and if I had you with me, I would be satisfied to stay here. But, stop me! I sure spend a lot of time dreaming of that post-war home you write about."* Amidst such daily stress from the intense flight schedule and war, my father was finding peace and beginning to imagine a life among the people of Assam.

He wrote often about his bearer, or house servant, Abdoul. When mother sent Abdoul a gold watch from the States, he ran outside so as to not be seen crying. He thought my mother looked beautiful and plenty healthy but he wondered why she never came to visit. Dad bought a Victrola record player from a departing pilot and Abdoul took command of it, playing his favorites, which were opera. When his tour ended, Dad gave Abdoul a month's pay and the gold pen he had written all the letters with. Abdoul ran from the basha to not be seen crying.

Dad's roommate was the base chaplain he called "The Preacher." He wrote mother, *"He keeps the drinking and the women parties down,"* though the Preacher much enjoyed that dad would pack bottles of beer in the bulkheads of his airplane that would freeze over the mountains so he could serve ice cold beer back in the hot jungle. The Preacher stowed away on flights to China and Dad gave him flying lessons over the Himalayas. Dad wrote, *"He was like a little kid at the controls, on the adventure of his life."* Dad also visited families in China and wrote, *"Went to a remote place and the women still bind their feet and they're no larger than their hands. Is this the 20th Century?"* It was becoming cold in China and still swelteringly hot in Tezpur. Dad was visiting the infirmary regularly with flu symptoms.



Dad's Indian "family"



Abdoul and "the Preacher."

By early December another crew was lost and pilots were refusing to fly. He wrote, *"There are several who are afraid to fly the Hump and some of them we used to think of as rocks. One captain was court-martialed when he refused, and got a dishonorable discharge. We lost a ship the other day, or I should say, another one, and everyone is jittery. I don't enjoy this, but the scariest part for me is working with crew members who are afraid. You never know what to expect from them."*

In late December, just before Dad's last flight over the Hump, Tokyo Rose, the Japanese radio propagandist, said in her broadcast that pilots crossing the Hump would die and never return. Dad wrote Mother about what Rose had said and remarked, *"Now you better start worrying about me."* His 66th and last trip over the Hump was flown amid a flurry of enemy alerts on the day after Christmas, 1944. On that flight they had to circle Chengkung for four hours waiting for a Japanese attack on that base to end before finally receiving landing clearance. Back in Tezpur, as he taxied in and shut down the empty C-109 for the last time, I imagine that he walked away with very little regret.

Along with most Hump pilots and crew, my father was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal. The experience of flying the Hump was well summarized in the citation that accompanied the award which reads as follows:

"Pursuant to authority contained in Army Regulations 600-45, War Department, Washington D.C., the Distinguished Flying Cross (Oak Leaf Cluster) is hereby awarded to the following named officers of the India China Division, Air Transport Command, for extraordinary achievement by participating in more than six hundred hours of operational flight in transport aircraft over the dangerous and difficult Assam-China air routes, where enemy interception and attack was probable and expected. Flying at night as well as by day, at high altitudes over impassable, mountainous terrain through areas characterized by extremely treacherous weather conditions necessitating long periods of operation on instruments, often encountering severe icing conditions and mechanical difficulties requiring courageous and superior performance of their respective duties to overcome, they accomplished their missions with distinction. Their heroic achievement in the face of hazards and difficulties faced regularly and continuously with steadfast devotion to duty, reflects much credit on themselves and the Army Air Forces of the United States."

It was Christmastime, 1944. Dad's duties flying the Hump were completed, but the war continued. The war news was disheartening. The Japanese were still advancing in China. The Navy and Marines had returned McArthur to the Philippines after terrible losses, yet a long siege of Japan was anticipated. Predictions of American casualties in an invasion of Japan ranged to the hundreds of thousands. In Europe, the Battle of the Bulge was underway as Germany stood its last vicious defense. Dad wrote, *"I am anticipating the fall of*

Germany every day. Guess our big bombers really knocked Formosa for a loop, and that gives me a little encouragement and feeling of accomplishment.” The fall of Berlin came four months later when the Russians captured the Reichstag. Until then, Germany had been under terrible bombardment by 8th Air Force B-17s. The Dresden fire bombing that killed over 80,000 was to come in February. Those operations very likely included several of the bombers that Dad had delivered to Europe in 1943.

In answering Mother’s 265th letter with his 199th (she wrote 275 to him that are lost), Dad’s New Year’s Eve letter reflects the uncertainty felt by many around the world on that night: *“If we were together in a quiet place, I could do lots of philosophizing about the passing of the old year. Am happy to have one more year of this unnatural existence behind us, but it is hard to become enthused over the life we face in the new year. However, if we do our part in living our lives properly, I feel confident that we will find the peace and happiness that so often seems to have vanished from the earth.”*

Mother had written joyfully that he would be returning soon since he had said he would not need any more instant coffee and other supplies sent by her. But he wrote back that he had no idea when he would be home. He narrowly avoided an assignment that would have held him in India another eighteen months. A colleague had been stuck in that duty. There were more rumors that the flying requirement would be extended by another hundred hours. He wrote, *“Don’t get any ideas of when I will return, until you hear me on the telephone, as that is as long as it will probably be.”* Dad remained in India another month waiting to receive the orders that would send him home. The Army took its time sending pilots out of theater. Even after the orders came, finding transportation back around the world was another challenge. He flew to Lucknow in north central India for a week of touring, and made a side trip to the Taj Mahal. Letter number 211 was written from Karachi where Dad was waiting for a flight out of India. He departed Karachi hitch hiking a transport on January 25, 1945. He rode through Abadan, Persia; Cairo; Tripoli; Casa Blanca; the Azores; then a long flight to Newfoundland; then to New York, and back to Delaware and Mother on the 28th of January.

There are many important postscripts to these letters and stories. Warriors suffer many losses far from the battles, long after the war is over. My father contracted Multiple Sclerosis years after the war. He had thought the cause was his long exposure to carbon monoxide and fuel fumes in old airplanes. The Mayo Clinic, where he received his treatment, had suggested that. Yet, more recent research has also theorized a viral cause of neurodegenerative diseases, and suggests that a cold virus originating on the Indian sub-continent might be a common cause of both MS and Alzheimer’s Disease. This has caused me to consider a possible implication of my father’s chronic viral illnesses over those months in India. Viral epidemics had been associated with both MS and Alzheimer’s in those regions. Once the virus infects, it may lie dormant for many years and then find a venereal transmission pathway. After long years of caring for both my parent’s conditions, in 1994 my mother died of Alzheimer’s Disease as I held her in my arms. So, I now wonder, in light of this new research, was she the final casualty of World War II in this story?

The main benefit of writing my book, and what made it all worthwhile, is that it became an application submission along with my second book, that got my father inducted into the Kansas Governor’s Aviation Hall of Fame in 2012. Over 350 Kansas aviation folk were at the ceremony for him that night in Wichita, my birthplace. I gave a brief acceptance speech. The Cessna Sales Manager came up to shake my hand and said, *“Arnold Palmer sends his regards.”* Mr. Palmer is a famously loyal Cessna Citation customer. An elderly gentleman took my hand and said, *“I was just a metal worker in the Cessna factory, but every time he came through, your father knew my name and asked about my family. It’s an honor to be here tonight.”* My father’s picture now hangs next to Walter Beech, Clyde Cessna, Bill Lear, Amelia Earhart and other Kansas aviation luminaries at the Kansas Aviation Museum.

In writing WWII and family histories, I have gained the sense that such complex events could never have been assembled by me without assistance from mysterious and perhaps spiritual influencers. I like to explain that the ancestors want their stories told. I was recently prompted to revise my book about the Hump by

a chance meeting in 2021 with Alex Dominick. He also wrote a book about his father flying the Hump, Peter H. Dominick, who later became Senator from Colorado. Our fathers were at Tezpur at the same time, both flew the C-87 and both men contracted Multiple Sclerosis after the war. Comparing their log books, we discovered they had flown a check ride together. Dad mentions this flight in a letter to Mother. Imagine, two men fly a proficiency check ride in India in 1944. Seventy-seven years later their author-sons meet by chance in Colorado. So, was meeting Alex merely a coincidence? Peter Dominick was one of two future U.S. Senators my father knew in the CBI theater. Dad wrote Mother about a luncheon in Karachi with his friend from earlier B-17 operations, Barry Goldwater. Another future Senator signed the orders that directed him to India, George McGovern.

When I was young and both my parents were vibrantly alive, I did not know enough to ask for old war stories. The letters written to Mother from Dad in India are a treasure I did not discover until she was moved to a nursing home in the 1990's. She had kept them to herself, hidden away, deep in a secret drawer. Written from a lonely basha in a Brahmaputran jungle, and from a freezing cockpit high above the Himalayas, they chronicled the heroic experiences my parents shared, and a once true-love cast in the midst of the world at war. And years later, I discovered my father's photographs. Early in his India tour, Dad had written that he was surprised and happy to learn that Mother was saving his letters. He wrote her, "*Who knows, maybe someday they will become a diary of all this.*" So, here, my parents have come together finally, to tell this story to you.

Source Acknowledgements:

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Inquiries-Orders: fredmsd@aol.com; FredTMartin.com

I learned interesting background details of the Hump Operation by reading:

Moser, Don. China-Burma-India. Time-Life Books. 1978.

Information about viral causation of MS and Alzheimer's is available at a number of recent online postings. I refer the reader to this January, 13, 2022 article: <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.abj822>

For more on the heroic Hump flights of Peter H. Dominick read his remarkable diaries in:

Dominick, Alex. Flying the Hump. 2018. M&B Global Solutions, Inc.
Inquiries: WordWorksbyAlex.com 602-363-4182

Quotations about the C-87 are from the classic aviation history:

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About the Author:

Fred Martin was born in Wichita, Kansas on the eighth anniversary of the Japanese surrender that ended World War II, about eight miles from the sprawling aircraft manufacturing facilities of the Boeing Military Airplane Company, Cessna Aircraft Company, Beechcraft Corporation and Lear Jet. He has written several aviation histories and done presentations and consulted for a number of museums, veteran and civic groups, including the Kansas Aviation Museum, Wichita, Kansas, and the Veteran's Museum, Broomfield, Colorado. He enjoys nostalgia, raising high achieving women, and living on the Front Range of Colorado.